

MOTIVES IN FOREIGN  
MISSIONS

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# MOTIVES IN FOREIGN MISSIONS

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# Motives in Foreign Missions

By Rev. Griffith John, Hankow, China

WHERE should the emphasis be placed in our advocacy of the missionary enterprise? Why should men give of their silver and their gold in order to carry on this enterprise? Why should men be asked to devote their lives to this work? What is the grand motive which should be used in our attempts to move the churches to greater activity and the missionaries to deeper consecration in this holy cause?

I. Should we place the emphasis on the relation of the missionary enterprise to the advancement of secular knowledge? I have heard appeals made for missions on this ground, and there can be no doubt as to the great utility of missions in this respect. It would be impossible to say how much the various departments of secular knowledge owe to foreign missions. Take geography, history, ethnology, philology, and such subjects. The best and most reliable in-



formation that we possess in these departments has come to us through the missionaries. Then, too, the heathen nations of the world are indebted to the missionaries for nearly all the knowledge which they possess on these subjects. This is a good thing in itself, and we rejoice in the fact that foreign missions have done so much to enlarge the sphere of human knowledge on every subject touching the world and its inhabitants. But we dare not place the emphasis on this fact in our advocacy of missions. An individual here and there might be touched by an appeal made on this ground, but it would kindle no enthusiasm in the hearts of men generally. Men will not become missionaries for the sake of promoting the growth of secular knowledge nor will the churches give of their wealth for this purpose.

II. Shall we place the emphasis on the relation of the missionary enterprise to the advancement of commerce? I have heard appeals made on this ground; and there can be no doubt of the utility of missions in this respect. The mission is the friend of legitimate commerce always and everywhere. While it sets its face like a flint against trade in opium and fire-water and all such abominations, it joyfully welcomes the honest and honorable trader and prepares the way for

him. Missionaries are pioneers of trade and commerce. They are the promoters of civilization, learning, and education wherever they may be, and these things breed new wants which commerce supplies. Look at Polynesia, Madagascar, Africa, and other countries, and see what missions have done for trade. But we dare not place the emphasis on this fact. The commercial motive is altogether too weak, too low, too outward to move men to consecrate themselves and their means to the cause of missions. We must have something far loftier, far stronger, and far more inward. Men will not become missionaries for the sake of advancing the interests of commerce; neither will the churches give of their wealth for this purpose.

III. Shall we place the emphasis on the relation of the missionary enterprise to the advancement of civilization? I have heard appeals made on this ground, and I have heard of men subscribing to missions because of their utility in this respect. Darwin became a subscriber to the work by reason of what he saw with his own eyes of the civilizing effects of missions. I have heard also of men refusing to subscribe to missions in China, on the ground that the Chinese were supposed to be a civilized people.

That the missionary enterprise is a

great civilizing agency is a fact which cannot be questioned. Look at the South Seas. There you see the wild cannibal turned into a lamb, the ferocious savage sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, and the debased, brutish pagan transferred into a heaven-aspiring and God-loving man. That is not only religion but civilization also. Referring to the great change which has been wrought in the moral and social life of the natives of Tahiti and New Zealand by the missionaries, Darwin writes: "In a voyager to forget these things is base ingratitude; for should he chance to be at the point of shipwreck, on some unknown coast, he will most devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary may have extended so far."

Turn to India. There, self-mutilation, human sacrifice, the burning of widows, and other cruel practices have been swept away, and this is to be ascribed in a great measure to the influence of the modern mission. Speaking of the missionaries in India, Lord Lawrence, late Viceroy of India, said, "However many benefits the English people may have conferred on India, the missionaries have accomplished more than all other influences combined." There is nothing in its line in the history of the world that can compare with England's



secular work in India during the past one hundred years, and yet Lord Lawrence did not hesitate to speak of the work of the missionaries in India as surpassing all others in point of importance.

As for Japan, it was in 1854 that the first treaty was concluded between it and any Western power. Since then the Land of the Rising Sun has been steadily moving toward the civilization of the West, and becoming more and more assimilated to Christian nations; and this is to be ascribed in a very great measure to the influence of the modern mission. The progress of Japan in Christian civilization has received a wonderful illustration in the recent struggle with China. I am not referring now to the material improvements, as demonstrated by the marvelous strength and efficiency of her army and navy, though that must be admitted to be one of the great marvels of the age. What astonishes one is the wonderful moral progress brought to light by this conflict. Their well-equipped commissariat and thoroughly efficient medical department; the careful provision made, not only for their own sick and wounded, but for the sick and wounded of the enemy also; their Red Cross Society, and the humane treatment of the prisoners taken in battle—all these things are new in Japan, and they are

the things which fill the hearts of all Christian workers in the Far East with wonder and gratitude. When, 300 years ago, the armies of Japan swept over Korea, the spirit of carnage and plunder was unrestrained. The ears of 3,600 victims, slain in a single battle, were brought back to Japan and exhibited as trophies of the cruel conflict. The same spirit would have prevailed in this war but for the influence of Christianity. I do not mean to say that the Japanese as a people have adopted Christianity as a religion; that, as yet, they have not done. And I do not mean to say that they are likely to do so, either to-day or to-morrow. It is impossible to foresee what religious developments may take place there in the near future. But they have come into vital contact with Christian methods; they have come under the influence of Christian teaching; the spirit of Christianity is moving them; Christian ideas are taking possession of them; and they are putting on Christian civilization with a rapidity and a thoroughness which astonish the world. Again I say that this is to be ascribed, in very great measure at least, to the influence of Christian missions.

"Humanity," says Colonel Denby, formerly United States Minister at Peking, "has not devised any better, or even

as good, engine or means for civilizing savage peoples as proselytism to Christianity. The history of the world attests this fact. In the interest, therefore, of civilization, missionaries ought not only to be tolerated, but ought to receive the protection to which they are entitled from the officials and encouragement from all other classes of people." Thus there can be no doubt as to the great value of Christian missions in this respect. It is getting to be seen more and more clearly every day that "among the culture forces of the world Christianity is the most powerful," and that the Christian missionary, instead of being an enemy, is the best friend of science, of commerce, and of civilization. For my own part, I do not believe that apart from Christianity there can be such a thing as true civilization. Are the Chinese a civilized people? No, and never will be as long as they remain unchristianized. The riots and massacres of recent years go far to show that their much-vaunted civilization is little else than veneered barbarism. This is an important fact, a fact on which due emphasis should be placed. Still the main emphasis cannot be placed on this fact. The civilizing motive, though a true one, is far too weak to move men to lay themselves and their property on the altar on behalf of

the heathen. It is too weak in itself to rouse the conscience and touch the hearts of men. Men will not become missionaries for the sake of civilizing the heathen, neither will the churches give of their wealth for this purpose.

IV. Shall we place the emphasis on the moral and spiritual condition of the heathen? This is a more important consideration. The moral and spiritual condition of the heathen world—its darkness, its immorality, and its hopelessness when viewed from the human standpoint, is sad beyond description. The heathen are living in sin and dying in sin. They are without God, without Christ, without hope. Now this is a solemn fact, and the true missionary cannot but place a solemn emphasis upon it. But even this cannot be regarded as the grand, central motive. It is a strong motive; but it is not the strongest. It is not powerful enough to carry us on to the end and to victory.

(1) It is not strong enough in itself to take the missionary to the field; it is certainly too weak to keep him there. The moral and spiritual condition of the heathen often creates strong aversion, deep loathing, and an intense desire to retire to a safe distance from the abomination. In itself it tends to repel rather than attract. What, think you, would be



the effect of an attempt on the part of the missionary in China to fix his eyes on the bad and vile in Chinese life and character? Would it not be the creation within his breast of a strong sentiment of distrust, contempt, aversion, detestation, despair? Would it be possible for him to go on and work for them? Pity for the heathen is a good motive; but the missionary cannot depend upon it as a permanently operative motive. There are times when love and pity seem to die down in the heart of the missionary as he comes into close contact with the badness of heathenism. What holds him fast in the midst of so much that tends to disgust and repel? I will answer that question hereafter. In the meantime I will relate a little anecdote. "Let me give you a piece of advice," said a missionary of some years' standing at Hankow to a young brother who had only just arrived at the place; "I advise you to try, as fast as possible, to learn to love the Chinese for Christ's sake, for you will find it very difficult to love them for their own sake." That was sound advice, based upon practical experience. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to say that it is impossible to love the Chinaman for his own sake. There are men among the converts for whom I feel the deepest personal affection. I

love them, and they love me, and, thank God, the number of such is increasing every day. Still, what I have just said is perfectly true.

(2) Moreover, the moral and spiritual condition of the heathen does not present a motive strong enough to move the home churches to do their duty. "How is it possible for me to bring myself to love and pity the Chinese? They are so far away, and I know so little about them. How can you expect me to feel an interest in them, and make any sacrifice on their behalf? They may be morally and spiritually in a state of great destitution, but how am I to realize their condition? How can you expect my heart to flow out toward them in love and pity?" So spoke one of the most thoughtful of our Congregational ministers to me when I was at home the last time. I felt that there was much truth in what he said and made an appeal to him on another and a higher ground—an appeal to which he quickly responded. We must have something more than pity for the moral and spiritual condition of the heathen if we would carry on this great missionary enterprise with unflagging energy and see it crowned with success. The work must be done, and the sacrifices must be made, not for their sakes, but for the sake of Another.

V. Shall we place the emphasis on the success of the modern mission? The emphasis is often placed on this consideration. The past triumphs of the Gospel, and the success of missions during these one hundred years, are often adduced as the grand argument why men should consecrate themselves and their substance to the missionary enterprise. The cry for success is loud and persistent, and there are men who profess to give only to success. That the Gospel has won great triumphs in the past is a fact that cannot be denied and this supplies good ground for perseverance. Success inspires confidence, and it is quite right that we should point to the success of the modern mission in our advocacy of the cause. But it is not *the* motive. The apostles had to start on their glorious mission without this motive. The fathers and founders of our great missionary societies had to enter on their grand enterprise without this motive. Many a missionary has had to toil on for years without this motive. Carey had to labor on for seven years before baptizing his first convert. Morrison had to do the same; and at the close of a laborious career of twenty-eight years he could not boast of ten converts. Thank God for success; success is sweet and inspiring, but we find that we have

often to work without success, and sometimes in spite of failure. What is *the* motive? What is *the* motive that impels the missionary forward in spite of difficulties, dangers, and adverse appearances?

What is *the* motive with which to arouse the churches to do their duty apart from all considerations of success, nay in spite of failures should they be called upon to do so? Where shall *the* emphasis be placed?

The emphasis must be placed, I think, on the relation of the missionary enterprise to Christ.

(1) And, first, to Christ's command. "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations." "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." That is the Great Commission; and that is our work. "Make disciples of all the nations;" "preach the Gospel to every creature." That is the work of the missionary; that is the work of the Church. The missionary is in China, not to promote the growth of secular knowledge; that will follow, but he is there not for that purpose. The missionary is in China, not to promote the interests of commerce; that will follow, but he is there not for that purpose. The missionary is in China, not to promote the cause of civilization; that will surely fol-



low, but he is there not for that purpose. The missionary is in China, not to promote the aggrandizement of any ism whatever; and I, for one, cannot pray that that may follow. The missionaries are there, not to make Methodists, or Baptists, or Congregationalists, or Presbyterians, or Episcopalians, or Lutherans. They are there to preach the Gospel, to make Christians, to bring that great people to Christ.

"Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." Go conquer the world for me. Carry the glad tidings into all lands and to every ear, and do not stop till all the nations shall have embraced the Gospel, and enrolled themselves my disciples. That is Christ's command, and that is our work.

Yes, and that is our argument also. Christ commands; it is our duty to obey; we have no choice in the matter. As long as we acknowledge Christ to be Lord, we are bound to go on with this work. In defending the cause of missions, we dare not take any ground lower than this. Neither is it safe to do so. "Does it not strike you," said Sir Robert Hart to Dr. Virgil C. Hart, "in reading the Chinese Classics, that there is much good, and much to be admired in the Chinese system? Would it not be well to leave well enough alone?" Dr.

Hart replied that, "if this was so, then the Chinese did not live up to their precepts." That was a good answer in its way; but it is by no means the answer. If there were no other answer the missionary enterprise would soon come to an end. But there is another answer, and an all-sufficient answer.

As to the Chinese system being well enough. I will not deal with that point now, save to say that I utterly deny that the Chinese system is "well enough," and that it is my firm conviction that China will never be right while this system lasts. But the right answer to that question is this: "Would it be well to disobey Christ?" That is the question which the missionary has to consider. It is not a question of letting "well enough alone"; but a question of obeying or disobeying Christ. Christ wills it; and we dare not disobey. That is our position.

"It is the will of God!" That is the motive selected by Peter the Hermit when he wanted to arouse Europe to rescue the Holy Land from the hands of the infidel. With that one sentence he stirred the whole of Christian Europe from its very depths, and kindled an enthusiasm such as history rarely presents an example of. "It is the will of Christ!" That is our motive. Let us put the em-

phasis on that; and with that motive let us arouse the church for a grander crusade, and strengthen our own hearts for new and nobler achievements.

(2) The relation of the missionary enterprise to Christ's dominion and power. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore." All power in heaven is mine. All the resources of heaven are at my command, and shall be used by me for the furtherance of your enterprise. All power on earth is mine. The world is mine—the whole of it. The heathen have been given to me for my inheritance, and the uttermost part of the earth for my possession; and in order to conquer it by your agency, all power in earth is given unto me. I have power over all persons, all possessions, all principles, all movements. They are all in my hands, they are all under my control, and they will all be made conducive to this glorious object—the evangelization of the world. Go ye therefore. Let the emphasis be placed on that glorious fact. Christ is Lord of all. He sits on the throne of the universe, and wields the scepter of universal dominion. He must reign till all His enemies become His footstool. Let us rest on that fact.

(3) The relation of the missionary enterprise to Christ's presence. "And lo,

I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "I am with you all the days." You feel your weakness and incompetence. I am with you to strengthen you, to guide you, and to furnish you with all necessary power. You will have your lonely days. I am with you to brighten the most lonely of your days, and to fill your hearts with my peace. You fear for the safety of the cause. Fear not. Be of good courage. I have overcome the world. The battle is mine, and the victory is certain. You are weak; but I am mighty. "I am with you all the days." Let us rest on that great fact—Christ with us every day, and every hour, and every moment of the day. Let the emphasis be laid on that promise.

(4) The relation of the missionary enterprise to Christ's love. "The love of Christ constraineth us." Paul was the prince of missionaries, and such was his experience as a missionary. Without the love of Christ he could have done nothing; with the love of Christ filling his heart he could do all things. "The love of Christ constraineth us."

(a) The love of Christ to me, personally, constrains me to live to Him and for Him. He died for me; and I will die for Him. He lives for me; and I will live for Him. I will work for His sake; I will



suffer for His sake. There is nothing I would not do to please Him. He is my Lord and my Savior. He loved me with an everlasting love. He gave Himself for me. I owe Him an infinite debt, a debt which is always due, and which I can never pay. All I can do is to lay myself on the altar, and say: Lord Jesus, take me as I am, and use me for Thine own purpose and glory. "The love of Christ constraineth me." That is a grand motive. The love of Christ to us, to each one of us personally. Let us place the emphasis on that great fact. (b) And then there is the love of Christ for the world—for the Hindus, for the Chinese, for the Japanese, for all men. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "He died for all." "He is the Savior of all men." It may be hard sometimes to love the heathen and make great sacrifices on their behalf. You may not be able to do it for their sake. Do it for Christ's sake. Think of the love of Christ for them, and love them through His love. Look at them through the eyes of Christ; His eyes are all-pitiful. Feel for them with the heart of Christ, which is ever tender and compassionate. People at home say that the heathen are so far away; that it is difficult to feel a deep interest in them and their concerns. Be

it so. But Christ is near, and it ought not to be difficult to feel an interest in Him and in His great redemptive purposes. "The love of Christ constraineth me." Let the emphasis be placed on that great motive. Paul found it there. Why should we not find it there also?

I have often thought of Paul and the Yang-tze together. On its way to the sea, the mighty stream has to encounter many obstacles, and flow in varied channels. In its upper courses, its bed in many places is uneven and narrow. But it never stops. Now it dashes against the rocks like a mad thing, and now it rushes through the narrow gorge at a mill-race speed. Then it emerges into a wide and even channel, and flows quietly, calmly, and majestically to the sea. But its flow is ever onward, continuous, irresistible. Try to turn it back, and you will find it impossible. Ask it to stop—and it will tell you that it cannot. Ask it why; and it will reply: "A mighty law has taken possession of me, and is carrying me onward. I cannot help myself. The law of gravity constraineth me." So it was with the great apostle. The love of Christ, like a mighty law, had taken possession of him, and was carrying him onward. He could not turn back, he could not stop, he could not help himself.

"The love of Christ constraineth me."  
His was a wonderful life. One sentence explains it all: "The love of Christ constraineth me."

Christ's command, Christ's commission, Christ's presence, Christ's love—these four combined make a mighty motive. This must ever be the grand central motive in the missionary enterprise. Other motives may come and go, but this abideth forever. It can never change, it can never grow weak, it can never become obsolete. It is permanently operative and all-sufficient. Let the church of God throughout the world place the emphasis on this motive, let the motive become a living force in the hearts of all the missionaries, let it become a living force in the hearts of Christ's disciples generally, and the result will be universal triumph. It will be triumph in Africa, triumph in India, triumph in China, triumph in Japan, triumph everywhere. Before the close of the twentieth century, great voices will have been heard in heaven saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."